

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 6353

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PN

SUBJECT: NEW PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

SUMMARY: ON OCTOBER 10, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTED DARIO GONZALEZ PITTY, CHIRIQUI PROVINCE, AS PRESIDENT FOR YEAR ENDING OCTOBER 1976. GONZALEZ APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN GOP'S FAVORED CANDIDATE, AND WON BY SUBSTANTIAL BUT FAR FROM OVERWHELMING MAJORITY. FROM PUBLIC STATEMENTS, HE ENVISIONS MORE ACTIVIST ROLE FOR ASSEMBLY DURING NEXT YEAR. PITTY IS WELL KNOWN AS LEFTIST, AND IS PROBABLY STILL MEMBER OF PANAMANIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, BUT EMBASSY CONSIDERS THAT HIS ELECTION DOES NOT PORTEND ANY TURN TO LEFT IN GENERAL TERMS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON OCTOBER 10, DAY PRIOR TO FORMAL OPENING OF ITS ONE-MONTH SESSION FOR 1975, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF CORREGIMIENTO REPRESENTATIVES (NACR) MET TO ELECT ITS NEW OFFICERS FOR UPCOMING SESSION AND YEAR ENDING OCTOBER 1976. TO REPLACE OUTGOING PRESIDEN RAUL CHANG, NACR ELECTED DARIO GONZALEZ PITTY, PROGRESO CORREGIMIENTO, BARU DISTRICT, CHIRIQUI PROVINCE, WHO HAS BEEN VICE PRESIDENT OF NACR (THERE IS ONE FROM EACH PROVINCE) FOR PAST YEAR. VOTING WAS SPLIT AMONG THREE CANDIDATES; FINAL TALLY WAS 260
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VOTES FOR GONZALEZ PITTY, 198 FOR DR. VICTOR M. CALDERON

OF CHITRE, AND 29 FOR CESAR PARDO OF COCLE.

2. BOTH GONZALEZ PITY AND CALDERON MADE THEIR CANDIDACIES KNOWN WELL IN ADVANCE AND HAD BEEN ACTIVELY SEEKING VOTES; CALDERON MADE FORMAL PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT AS EARLY AS AUGUST 11. HOWEVER, WITH NO CANDIDATED FROM PANAMA PROVINCE IN FIELD (ITS DELEGATION FINALLY SPLIT, WITH MAJORITY FOR GONZALEZ PITY), GONZALEZ PITY HAD STRONGER BASE OF SUPPORT IN NUMERICALLY POWERFUL CHIRIQUI DELEGATION (WHICH SUPPORTED HIM 90 TO 7 FOR CALDERON), AND WAS PROBABLY BETTER KNOWN DUE TO HIS LEADING ROLE IN BANANA WORKERS' UNION IN CHIRIQUI. ALSO, HE GAVE PRESS CONFERENCE ON OCTOBER 9 IN WHICH HE BILLED HIMSELF AS CANDIDATE OF UNITY AND OUTLINED ACTIVIST VIEW OF ROLE OF NACR PRESIDENT; THIS RECEIVED GOOD COVERAGE BY BOTH PRO-GOP MORNING PAPERS FOR DAY OF ELECTION, AND WE READ THIS AS A SIGNAL OF GOP PREFERENCE, ALTHOUGH STRENGTH OF VOTE FOR OTHERS INDICATES THAT REPRESENTATIVES DID NOT PERCEIVE THEMSELVES AS BEING UNDER UNDUE PRESSURE TO VOTE FOR HIM.

3. IN PRESS INTERVIEW (FULL TEXT POUCHED ARA/PAN) AND STATEMENT TO FORMAL OPENING SESSION OF NACR ON OCTOBER 11 (FBIS/PANAMA PA 112320Y), GONZALEZ PITY INDICATED THAT HE GAVE FIRST PRIORITY TO IMPROVING INTERNAL ORGANIZATION OF NACR; IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN EXACTLY WHAT HE MEANT BY THIS. HE ALSO CALLED FOR MORE ACTIVE ROLE OF ASSEMBLY IN LEGISLATIVE PROCESS, THROUGH INVOLVING IT IN PREPARATION AND APPROVAL OF DRAFT LEGISLATION FOR PRESENTATION TO NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INSTEAD OF CONFINING ITSELF TO HORTATORY RESOLUTIONS. HE WENT ON TO STATE INTENTION OF MAKING CONSULTATION MECHANISM BEFORE APPROVAL OF LAWS BY NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL MORE FUNCTIONAL AND EFFECTIVE AT PROVINCIAL STAGE AND THROUGH LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE BODIES. REMAINDER OF HIS INAUGURAL SPEECH WAS APPEAL FOR UNITY BY ALL SIDES AND FACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT.

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4. INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY INDICATES THAT GONZALEZ PITY WAS ACTIVE MEMBER OF PARTIDO DEL PUEBLO (PDP, PANAMANIAN COMMUNIST PARTY) AS OF MARCH 1972, AND OUR RECORDS SHOW HIM AS MEMBER FOR SEVERAL YEARS PREVIOUS TO THIS, GOING BACK TO HIS STUDENT DAYS IN 1960'S. HE AND SEVERAL BROTHERS, ALL OF WHOM ARE APPARENTLY MEMBERS OF PDP, HAVE BEEN HIGHLY ACTIVE POLITICALLY IN CHIRIQUI, PARTICULARLY

AMONG BANANA WORKERS' UNION THERE WHICH IS KNOWN TO HAVE A SUBSTANTIAL PDP INFILTRATION AMONG ITS LEADERSHIP (ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT FORMALLY AFFILIATED WITH THE PDP-DOMINATED LABOR CENTRAL, THE CNTP). HE IS PUBLICLY KNOWN AS A LEFTIST AND PROBABLY COMMUNIST; WE HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT HE IS NOT STILL A MEMBER OF THE PARTY. HOWEVER, FOR PAST SEVERAL YEARS, MODUS VIVENDI BETWEEN TORRIJOS AND PDP HAVE LEFT PARTY FAR MORE AN INSTRUMENT OF TORRIJOS THAN AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTOR; MOST ACTIVE PRESSURE ON GOP FROM LEFT COMES FROM EXTREMISTS UNAFFILIATED, OR ONLY LOOSELY AFFILIATED, WITH PDP--OF SORT GONZALEZ PITY IMPLICITLY CONDEMNED IN HIS SPEECH. ACCORDINGLY, WE DO NOT READ HIS ELECTION AS BEING IN ITSELF A SIGNIFICANT TURN TO LEFT BY GOP.

5. IN VIEW OF HIS POLITICAL PERSUASION, GONZALEZ PITY WILL PROBABLY FIND CONGENIAL THE ROLE WHICH HAS FALLEN TO PRESIDENT OF NACR, ALONG WITH MEMBERS OF NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION, OF SERVING AS PRINCIPAL GOP LIAISON WITH SOCIALIST AND "REVOLUTIONARY" GOVERNMENTS WITH OR WITHOUT FORMAL RELATIONS WITH PANAMA. IN OTHER RESPECTS, PRESIDENCY OF NACR HAS CARRIED WITH IT CERTAIN AMOUNT OF PRESTIGE AND INFLUENCE FOR HIS PREDECESSORS, BUT IT HAS BEEN CIRCUMSCRIBED BY THE LIMITED COMPETENCE, AND LIMITED DURATION OF NACR SESSION, ALLOWED UNDER THE 1972 CONSTITUTION. GONZALEZ PITY EVIDENTLY WOULD LIKE TO PRESIDE OVER AN EXPANSION OF THE CONSULTATIVE ROLE OF THE QUASI-LEGISLATIVE STRUCTURE, CULMINATING IN THE NACR, SET UP UNDER THAT CONSTITUTION; RESULTS OF CURRENT SESSION MAY GIVE SOME INDICATION OF WHETHER HE WILL BE ALLOWED TO DO SO.

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